



BEYOND NEXT SEMESTER

The Advantages of Annual Scheduling

RESULTS OF THE JUNE 2025 60-SECOND SURVEY

Wendy Kilgore, Ph.D.

Senior Director of Research
AACRAO

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THE BIG QUESTION

How do institutions approach class scheduling? Do they plan strategically for the full academic year? Do they build schedules term by term?

These fundamental questions shape how learners experience their academic journey and how institutions manage their resources.

A 60-second survey sent to scheduling professionals in June 2025 addressed these questions. We asked professionals at colleges and universities to share their class-scheduling practices, including identifying opportunities for improvement and challenges. We received **471 institutional-level responses**, a statistically representative sample of U.S. Title-IV eligible degree-granting institutions. Results provide insights into current practices and emerging trends in academic scheduling across higher education in the United States.

The Bottom Line: Most institutions are stuck in reactive, term-by-term scheduling cycles that may prioritize faculty convenience over learner success. A growing number of institutions are discovering that annual scheduling is about more than operational efficiency. It's about fundamentally changing how learners experience postsecondary education.



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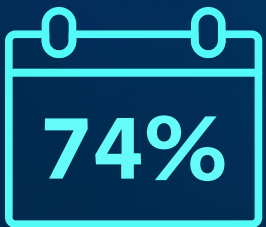
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KEY TAKEAWAY

The Scheduling Landscape



of institutions still operate on term-by-term scheduling



With our current resources, we do not have the capacity to build an annual schedule successfully. This would require a transformation of business processes across the institution, not just in academics.

New Majority

37% of institutions using term-by-term scheduling **aspire** to implement annual scheduling



26% of institutions **currently practice** full annual scheduling

63% of combined institutions **use, or aspire to use**, annual scheduling



What this tells us:

A new majority of institutions recognizes the value of strategic, long-term planning.



Other Key Takeaways

THE IMPLEMENTATION GAP



Among annual schedulers,
60% provide learners full
academic-year schedule visibility



21% of annual-scheduling
institutions allow learners to
register for an entire academic year



57% of annual schedulers
limit learner registration to
one term at a time

TECHNOLOGY AND PROCESS REALITY



≈22% of institutions rely on manual processes for scheduling

42% use built-in SIS functionality as their primary scheduling tool

BARRIERS ARE CULTURAL, NOT TECHNICAL

- + Top barriers to annual scheduling include faculty resistance to long-term planning, change-management challenges and resource constraints
- + The greatest challenge isn't technology — it's shifting from a faculty-centric to a learner-centric scheduling culture

THE OPPORTUNITY

- + Institutions employing annual scheduling believe there are significant benefits to this practice:
 - 74%** cite operational efficiency
 - 69%** see enrollment-management advantages
 - 60%** identify learner-success benefits
- + The real opportunity is fundamentally changing how learners experience college planning and persistence





The Divide Between Annual Scheduling and Term-by-Term Scheduling

The scheduling world is split into two camps. Differences run deeper than planning timelines.

Annual Scheduling means building an entire academic year's worth of classes at once — Fall, Spring and Summer in one comprehensive planning cycle. It's the "let's think about this holistically" approach.

Term-by-Term Scheduling is the traditional "build next semester during this semester" model. It's the way most institutions do it, but that doesn't mean it's the best way.



Think of it this way: Annual scheduling is like meal planning for the week. You think about nutrition, variety and budget all at the same time. Term-by-term scheduling is like opening the fridge each night and asking yourself, "What can I make for dinner with what's here?"

Several sections in this report include representative quotes from survey respondents to illustrate key themes and patterns. These examples were selected from the full dataset of open-ended responses to provide insight into the range of experiences and perspectives shared by institutions.



How Institutions Approach Scheduling

THE ANNUAL SCHEDULING ADOPTION GAP



74%

operate on term-by-term scheduling

26%

of institutions build their schedule for a full academic year at once

WHERE RESPONSIBILITY ACTUALLY LIES

When we asked who is ultimately responsible for the accuracy of the class schedule, responses revealed the organizational reality behind scheduling decisions.



Clear Leaders

58%

Registrar's Office

14%

Academic Department Level

11%

Provost/Chief Academic Officer



Interesting Outliers

9% at the college level within a university

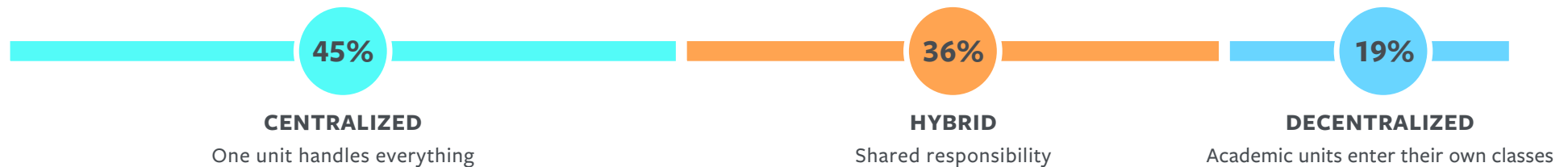
2% Associate or Assistant Provost

2% Curriculum Management Office

3% other responsibility areas not listed in the survey

THE DATA ENTRY REALITY

How institutions build their schedules reveals a great deal about their organizational culture.



The Annual-Scheduling Advantage

For those who have made the switch



BENEFITS IDENTIFIED BY INSTITUTIONS

Among the **26% of institutions** practicing annual scheduling, below are the primary benefits they cite.



The Learner Success Impact

69%

enrollment management advantages

60%

learner success gains



What this tells us:

Institutions that have adopted annual scheduling recognize its value, with operational efficiency and faculty management as the most commonly cited benefits. While learner success is often positioned as the primary driver for educational changes, 60% of annual-scheduling institutions identify learner success as a key benefit. This suggests operational advantages may be more immediately apparent than learner outcome improvements. The 3% that see no benefits highlight that annual scheduling success isn't automatic; it may depend on effective implementation and organizational readiness.

1. Rounding may result in a total of greater or less than 100%



The Operational and Management Gains¹

74%

operational efficiency improvement

73%

faculty management benefits

54%

space management optimization



The Skeptical Minority

3%

of institutions using annual scheduling see no benefits in the provided categories of learner success, operational efficiency, enrollment management, faculty management or space management

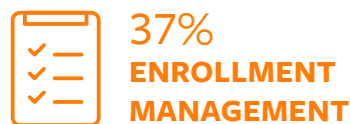


The Value of Annual Scheduling

Respondents were asked to rank the benefits of annual scheduling. The data reveal that institutions recognize diverse value propositions from annual scheduling, with benefits distributed across multiple priorities rather than concentrated in a single area. This multifaceted value proposition suggests annual scheduling can serve various institutional needs and strategic objectives simultaneously.

THREE IMPLEMENTATION VALUE DRIVERS

When examining first-place rankings, three core benefits emerge as primary drivers for adoption:



FACULTY MANAGEMENT: THE STRATEGIC FOUNDATION

Faculty management, which involves the ability to assign courses on an annual basis (as is typical in most faculty contracts), exhibits a distinctive pattern in the rankings. While less frequently cited as the top priority (14%), it appears consistently across middle rankings (29% second, 25% third, 26% fourth), suggesting institutions view faculty-management benefits as foundational to achieving broader goals.

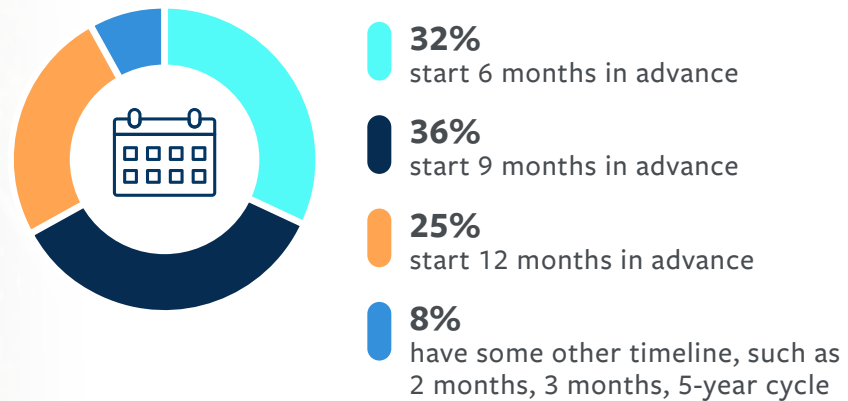
SPACE MANAGEMENT: THE OPERATIONAL ENHANCEMENT

Space management benefits include the ability to more effectively manage instructional capacity throughout the full academic year, rather than term by term. While ranking lower in priority (28% in fifth place; 22% in fourth, 33% third, 12% in second, and 5% in first place), represent valuable operational improvements that complement other annual scheduling advantages. For institutions with space constraints or complex facility management needs, these benefits can provide meaningful operational support alongside the primary strategic drivers.

A Review of Timelines and Strategy

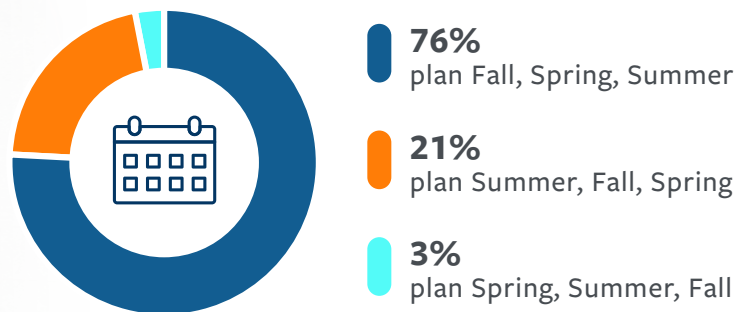
PLANNING TIMELINE

Among institutions using annual scheduling, the planning timeline varies.



THE SEMESTER-SEQUENCING STRATEGY

Among institutions using annual scheduling, the sequence for planning reveals strategic thinking.

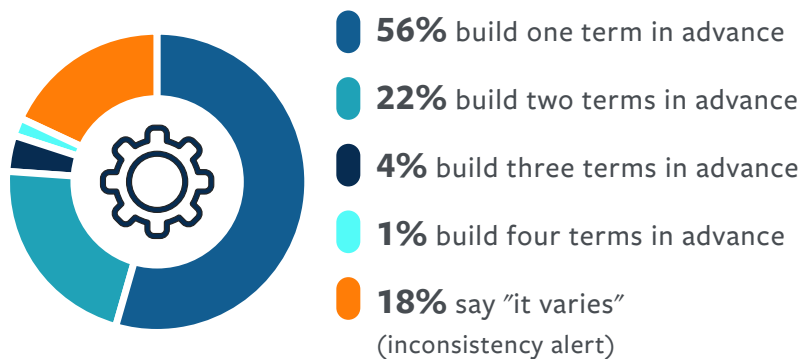


TERM-BY-TERM REALITY

For the 74% of institutions not using annual scheduling

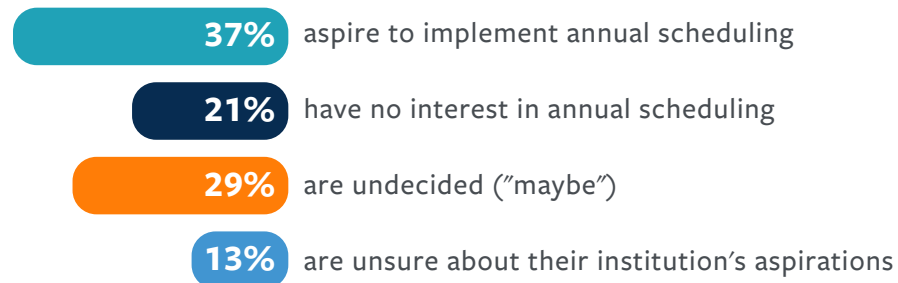
How Many Terms Ahead Are You Planning?

Among institutions not using annual scheduling:



The 18% of institutions that report "it varies," reveal scheduling approaches that change based on timing within the academic cycle and term-structure complexity. These institutions commonly build summer and fall schedules simultaneously during spring planning cycles, then handle spring scheduling separately. This creates a pattern of planning one term ahead, sometimes two. Others adjust their advance planning based on seasonal factors, with some building preliminary schedules up to a year in advance. In contrast, others shift between different planning horizons depending on faculty contracts, budget cycles or the specific needs of different academic programs within their institution.

The Annual Scheduling Aspiration Gap



The Surprising Learner-Access Reality

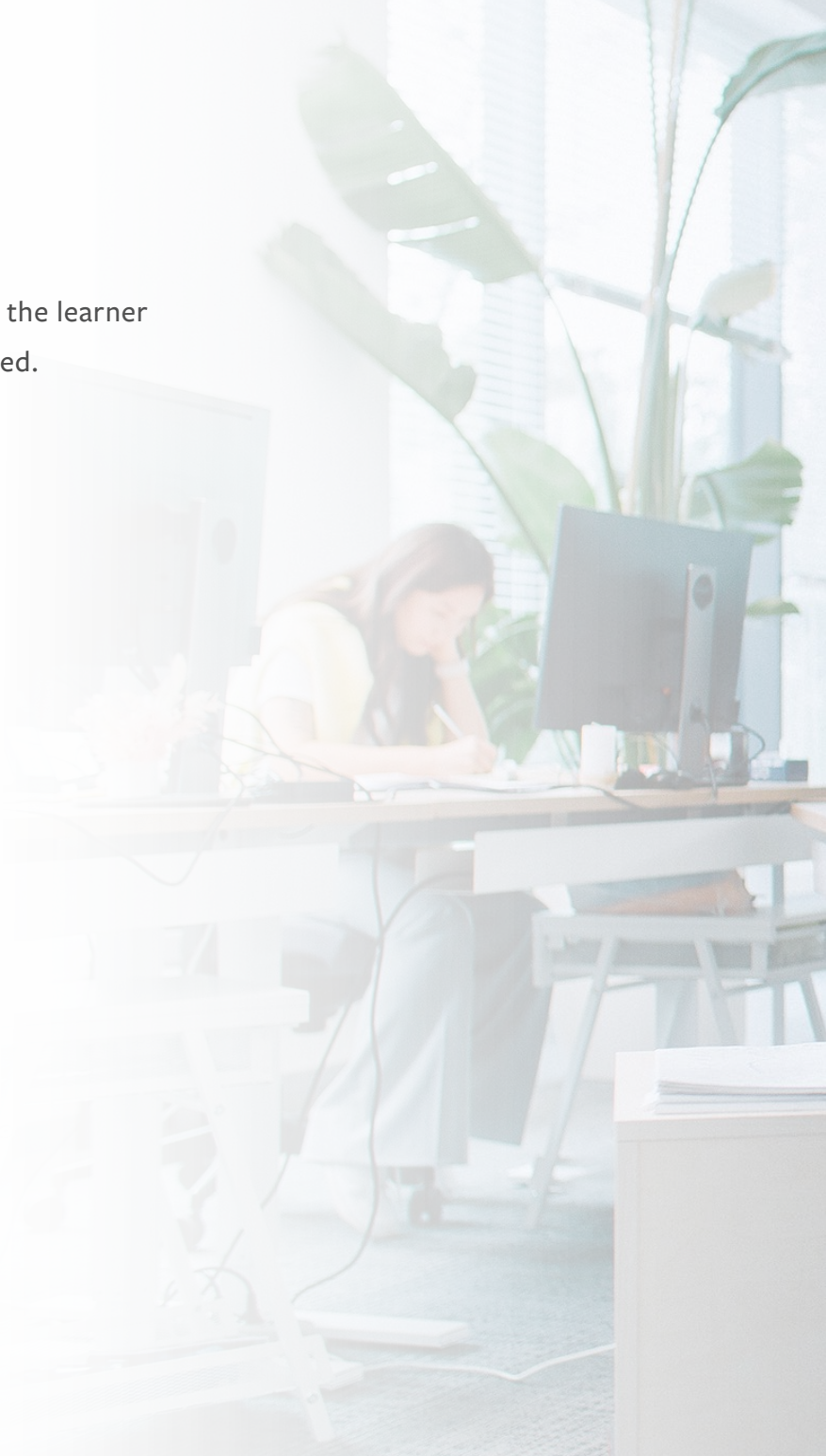
Despite the operational differences between annual and term-by-term scheduling, the learner experience at both types of institutions is remarkably similar and surprisingly limited.

SCHEDULE VISIBILITY

Time Frame	Annual-Scheduling Institutions	Term-by-Term Scheduling Institutions
Full academic year	60%	n/a
Next two terms	13%	20%
Next term only	21%	73%
Other limits	6%	7%

REGISTRATION ACCESS

Time Frame	Annual-Scheduling Institutions	Term-by-Term Scheduling Institutions
Full academic year	21%	n/a
Next two terms	7%	9%
Next term only	57%	81%
Other patterns	14%	9%



The Implementation Gap

These data reveal a striking disconnect: **Even institutions that invest in annual scheduling are predominantly operating with term-by-term learner-access policies.** While annual schedulers are more likely to provide extended visibility and registration access, many still restrict learners to short-term planning horizons.



Among Annual Scheduling Institutions

60% provide full academic year schedule visibility to learners

21% allow learners to register for the whole academic year

57% still limit registration to one term at a time

What this tells us: These data expose a fundamental gap between institutional scheduling practices and learner-facing policies that undermines the potential benefits of annual scheduling.

The “Internal versus External” Disconnect: Annual scheduling at many institutions appears to be more about administrative convenience than learner empowerment. They’re doing the complex work of annual planning but not restructuring their learner-facing systems to match.

Missed Strategic Opportunity: Institutions are gaining operational benefits but missing one of annual scheduling’s biggest potential advantages — helping learners plan their entire academic year for greater persistence and completion outcomes.

Conservative Implementation: Even when institutions show learners the full-year schedule, most maintain restrictive registration policies that limit a learner’s ability to secure their academic pathway.

The bottom line: Most institutions claiming to practice “annual scheduling” may not realize its full potential for learner success. They’re getting the faculty-management and operational benefits while leaving the learner-planning and retention advantages on the table.





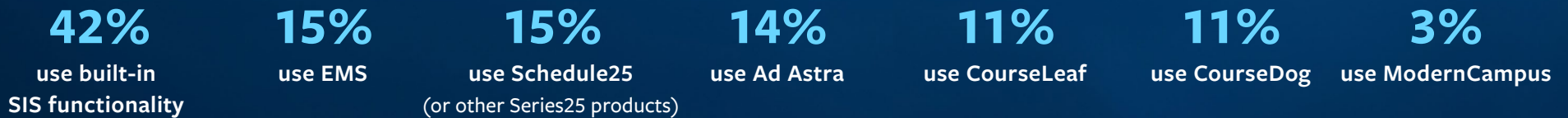
The Technology Landscape — What's Actually Being Used



The Scheduling-Software Reality

When we asked all respondents what technology supports class scheduling, responses revealed the current market landscape. Some institutions use more than one technology to support scheduling, which means percentages below may total more than 100%.

THE MAJOR PLAYERS



Other Specialized Solutions and the Knowledge Gap

22% use other specialized solutions or manual processes **5%** don't know what technology their institution uses (concerning)



We are doing things in a very old-fashioned manner, so we will be launching new software to help us next year.



The “Other” Technology Reality



The 22% of institutions using other specialized solutions or manual processes reveals a significant portion of higher education still operating with makeshift scheduling approaches. **However, many are actively seeking to modernize.**

THE EXCEL/SPREADSHEET ECOSYSTEM

The overwhelming majority of these responses center on Excel, Google Sheets or other spreadsheet applications as primary scheduling tools. Institutions describe using “spreadsheets galore,” “good old fashioned Excel” and processes where “departments submit their schedules on a spreadsheet and the Registrar’s Office enters them.” One respondent candidly noted their Excel system is “a beast of a sheet and not recommended,” highlighting the unwieldy nature of these manual approaches.

COMPLETELY MANUAL OPERATIONS

A substantial subset operates with no scheduling technology whatsoever, with responses like “we don’t use anything,” “none,” “nothing; manual” and “we do not have scheduling software.” These institutions are building entire academic schedules by hand, representing significant operational risks and workload burdens.

HOMEGROWN SYSTEMS AND THEIR LIMITATIONS

Several institutions mention custom-built or “homegrown” solutions, though these often create more problems than they solve. One respondent noted their homegrown system has “oversight difficulty in changing/modifying to meet needs,” illustrating how custom solutions can become inflexible obstacles rather than helpful tools.

THE TRANSITION WAVE

Many responses indicate institutions are actively implementing new solutions, mentioning transitions to CourseDog, Ad Astra, Banner and other platforms. Phrases such as “we are implementing,” “going live with” and “in the process of moving to” suggest widespread recognition that current manual processes are unsustainable.

COMPLEXITY AS A BARRIER

Some institutions indicate their scheduling needs are “too complicated” for available software solutions or that existing systems can’t handle their complexity, suggesting either unique institutional requirements or gaps in current software capabilities.



What this tells us:

This 22% represents institutions caught between outdated manual processes and modern scheduling solutions. While it is concerning that so many institutions still rely on error-prone manual methods, the high number of institutions actively transitioning to dedicated scheduling software indicates growing recognition that professional scheduling tools are essential for operational efficiency and learner success.



Where Your Institution Fits

Findings reveal significant variations in how institutions approach academic scheduling and highlight opportunities, regardless of current practices.

74%

TERM-BY-TERM INSTITUTIONS

You're in the majority, but data suggests room for improvement. With 56% planning just one term ahead, extending to two terms could improve learner planning and operational efficiency without the complexity of full annual scheduling.

37% (of term-by-term institutions) ANNUAL SCHEDULING ASPIRANTS

You represent significant interest in change, but the barriers are real. Focus first on the cultural and communication challenges rather than technology. Successful institutions emphasize faculty buy-in and cross-departmental coordination matter more than perfect systems.

26%

CURRENT ANNUAL SCHEDULERS

You've made the leap, but are you maximizing the benefits? Only 60% of you provide learners full-year schedule visibility, suggesting missed opportunities for learner success gains.

22%

MANUAL USERS

You're operating with significant constraints, but you're not alone. The key is to improve processes before investing in technology. Better coordination and planning timelines will amplify any eventual software investment.



I would like to see our university produce a schedule of courses at least 2 years out so learners can plan their plans of study.

The Scheduling Choice Every Institution Faces

This research reveals a field at a turning point. When you combine the 26% already practicing annual scheduling with the 37% aspiring to implement it, a new majority (63%) recognizes that strategic, long-term scheduling may be superior to reactive, term-by-term cycles.

Institutions successfully making this transition aren't necessarily better funded or more technologically sophisticated. They're the ones willing to prioritize learner success alongside operational efficiency. They've chosen to extend planning horizons, improve cross-departmental coordination and use data to drive decisions, rather than defaulting to "how we've always done it."

Research reveals that even institutions claiming to do "annual scheduling" may be missing the biggest potential benefit — empowering learners to plan their complete academic journey for better persistence and completion outcomes. The real opportunity isn't operational efficiency; it's fundamentally changing how learners experience college.

Regardless of your current approach or future plans, the following diagnostic questions can help you identify opportunities to better serve your learners.



Quick Start Self-Assessment

Term-by-Term Institutions

- + *Key metric:* How many schedule changes do you make after publication?
- + *Assessment question:* What percentage of your course offerings are scheduled based on learner demand data versus faculty preference?
- + *Planning indicator:* How often do learners tell advisors, “The class I need isn’t offered this term”?

Annual-Scheduling Aspirants

- + *Readiness metric:* What percentage of your departments can accurately predict their staffing needs 6+ months in advance?
- + *Change-management indicator:* How many times per term do you hear “we’ve always done it this way” in scheduling discussions?
- + *Data baseline:* Do you currently track which courses have waitlists and how often learners can’t get required classes?

Current Annual Schedulers

- + *Learner benefit metric:* What percentage of your learners can actually see a full academic year and register for it?
Do you see higher Degree Velocity™ as a result of moving to the annual schedule?
- + *Implementation success:* Are you still making the same number of schedule changes as before annual scheduling?
- + *ROI indicator:* Has annual scheduling reduced your administrative workload or just shifted it earlier?

Manual Users

- + *Risk assessment:* How many hours per week does your team spend on manual schedule entry and corrections?
- + *Error rate:* How often do manual processes result in scheduling conflicts or learner-registration problems?
- + *Scalability check:* Could your current process handle a 20% increase in course offerings?

These metrics will help you identify the most promising opportunities for improvement. They can help you determine whether to focus on incremental changes or pursue more fundamental shifts in your scheduling approach.



Frontline feedback

With nearly 500 respondents, a range of experiences and insights were captured in this 60-second report. The following appendix highlights these frontline voices.



What Annual Scheduling Achieves: Some Success Stories

When institutions successfully implement annual scheduling, benefits extend far beyond operational convenience. They fundamentally transform how learners navigate their academic journey and how institutions support learner success.

LEARNER SUCCESS AND RETENTION GAINS

The most compelling outcomes center on improved learner experiences, including advances in retention and persistence.

"This has helped with learner retention because advisors can talk with learners about the whole year at once, and learners can plan further in advance."

"It has helped retention, especially in more competitive programs. The learners feel commitment to the program when enrolled in all three terms."

ENHANCED LEARNER PLANNING AND ADVISING

Institutions consistently report that annual scheduling transforms how learners and advisors approach academic planning.

"Students are able to plan their schedule for the year because they know what will be offered."

"For our cohort programs that think 1 year, full-year registration has relieved anxiety about course planning. They can now see it and believe in it."

"Because our learners are mostly distance learners and often work part-time or full-time, have families and many responsibilities outside their studies, advance class planning is important to them."

OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Many institutions cite significant improvements in how they manage faculty, space and administrative processes.

"Able to better manage our time and have more control of when the schedule is built (not as much rush)."

"Faculty load is easier to determine when there is full-year scheduling."

EARLY SCHEDULING PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

Annual scheduling helps institutions spot and address issues before they become learner barriers.

"Learners need to be able to plan. Advisors need to be able to help plan to graduation. Departments can identify conflicts earlier."

"We know which classes are going to fill quicker and where we may need additional sections earlier than planning a semester ahead."



LONG-TERM INSTITUTIONAL BENEFITS

Some institutions report broader strategic advantages.

"We serve multiple countries and languages, therefore it is the only way we can get an overview of the resources by scheduling for a year in advance (budget, faculty, learner-driven data, etc.)"

"Better planning and forecasting for faculty needs."

THE REALITY CHECK — NOT EVERYONE SEES SUCCESS

Annual scheduling isn't universally successful. Some institutions report mixed or disappointing results.

"None. It hasn't worked as intended."

"Mostly we have benefited from some operational efficiencies and planning benefits (course, learners and faculty), but some people do not feel that way. We thought there may be some benefits to retention, but it is difficult to make that link and there was no discernible change."

TOO EARLY TO TELL

Some institutions noted they're still evaluating outcomes.

"As the University has only recently resumed using an annual scheduling approach, it is too early to report specific outcomes."



What this tells us:

These responses reveal that institutions implementing annual scheduling report a wide range of benefits; learner planning and advising improvements appear most frequently across responses. Many institutions emphasize operational-efficiency gains and better faculty management, while several specifically mention retention and persistence improvements. However, responses also show significant variation in implementation maturity. Some institutions have used annual scheduling for decades while others are in their first year of implementation.

Notably, several institutions acknowledge they haven't measured outcomes systematically ("too early to tell," "continue to assess") or report that anticipated benefits like retention improvements have been "difficult to make that link." Responses suggest that while institutions are generally satisfied with annual scheduling, the specific benefits realized may depend on institutional context, implementation approach and how long the practice has been in place.



The Implementation Lessons: What They Learned

Institutions that have successfully transitioned to annual scheduling emphasize that the process requires fundamental changes in planning culture, communication practices and institutional coordination. Most report the initial effort far exceeds expectations but becomes manageable over time.

START EARLY AND PLAN EXTENSIVELY

Successful annual scheduling requires more lead time than institutions initially expect.

“Starting the process 9-12 months prior to the start of that academic year is a must to work on staffing/faculty contract issues, but it has been a blessing to force sabbatical and other faculty release-time planning forward, too.”

“We should start a year and half in advance.”

“Earlier timeline is better. We start sending out materials in December, with first deadlines at the end of January.”

COMMUNICATION IS EVERYTHING

Institutions emphasize that communication challenges can make or break annual scheduling efforts.

“Communication is key. Changes need to be communicated as soon as possible.”

“It takes a lot of communication and planning ahead of time before actually launching it.”

“It’s not easy, many don’t want to do it and you need buy-in from leadership at a high level to change the mindset of everyone.”

EMBRACE FLEXIBILITY AND ACCEPT CHANGE

The most successful institutions learn to balance long-term planning with operational reality.

“It’s never going to be perfect.”

“You will always need to be somewhat flexible with future semesters. We set a date at which faculty are to review the published schedule and make any necessary adjustments before we begin registration for that semester.”

“A lot changes between making the schedule and registration for the semesters that are furthest out.”

SHIFT FROM FACULTY-CENTRIC TO LEARNER-CENTRIC THINKING

This cultural transformation has proved to be a challenging aspect.

“Shifting from a faculty-driven schedule to a learner-driven schedule is difficult. The business practice and/or mindset shift takes time.”

“Learners may like planning, but departments sure don’t!”

“Don’t let faculty choose class times based on their needs and not learners’ needs or space preferences that limit seat capacity. Schedule with learners as a first priority.”

COORDINATE WITH OTHER CAMPUS SYSTEMS

Annual scheduling affects multiple campus operations that must be aligned.

“One big lesson is to line up with the processes in our business office with their billing. Early on, many learners had holds that kept them from registering for both semesters, till we lined up registration dates and billing dates better.”

“It is hard to get the campus budget authority to match course planning. We’ve had some fits and starts.”

THE REALITY OF IMPLEMENTATION EFFORTS

Institutions warn that annual scheduling requires significant upfront investment.

“It’s twice as much work up front. We have to plan on making many, many changes in the fall for the spring schedule and learner registration.”

“The longer we have to plan and work with the data, the better. Having faculty, program directors and chairs proof several times during the process helps with the accuracy.”



What this tells us:

Successful annual-scheduling implementation isn’t just about changing timelines. It requires fundamental shifts in institutional culture, communication practices and resource allocation. Institutions that succeed are those willing to invest heavily in the planning process while maintaining flexibility for inevitable changes.





The Biggest Challenges in Annual Scheduling

Even institutions committed to annual scheduling face significant hurdles. Analysis of open-ended responses reveals five major challenge categories.

FACULTY COORDINATION AND RESISTANCE

The most frequently cited challenge involves managing faculty expectations and securing cooperation for long-term planning.

"Getting Department Chairs to think about the entire year, instead of focusing on one semester at a time."

"As a registrar, it's hard to get faculty and deans to plan that far ahead."

"Faculty/department chair buy-in" and "Getting faculty to submit all proposals to the curricular policy committee in a timely way" were common comments, highlighting the cultural shift required for successful annual scheduling.

WHEN CHANGES UNDERMINE PLANNING

Institutions struggle with constant modifications that undermine the stability annual scheduling is supposed to provide.

"The number of changes that are still made to the already posted schedule."

"There are too many changes after the launch of a schedule so far in advance. It does not add anything, in my opinion."

"People have to be committed to the schedule and limit changes to only those situations where there is no choice."

ENROLLMENT-PREDICTION DIFFICULTIES

Forecasting learner demand a full year in advance creates significant uncertainty.

"Trying to predict how many new learners will need certain classes."

"Creating the projected learner numbers. It would be great to have an inexpensive predictive analytics scheduling tool for universities."

"Predicting demand for certain elective courses, and ensuring a sufficient number of sections for upper-level required courses."

TECHNOLOGY AND SYSTEM LIMITATIONS

Many institutions lack the technological infrastructure to support efficient annual scheduling.

"We use an antiquated system — EMS."

"We are doing things in a very old-fashioned manner, so we will be launching new software to help us next year."

"Our entire schedule is built manually, one course at a time. It is a huge undertaking."

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION BREAKDOWNS

Cross-departmental coordination emerges as a persistent challenge.

"Constant changes that originate from the department and lack of communication between centralized admin departments and academic departments."

"Departments not talking to other departments about the scheduling of certain courses."

"Getting full compliance from all colleges/academic departments."

THE RESOURCE REALITY

The intensive nature of annual scheduling creates workload and timing pressures.

"It's a lot of work to get it initially established but nice to have when it's done."

"The biggest challenge for me is aligning the schedule with institutional deadlines and ensuring it's finalized in time for the building of courses, registration, billing and financial-aid processes."



What this tells us:

Barriers to annual scheduling are primarily organizational and cultural. Successful implementation requires addressing faculty resistance, improving cross-departmental communication and managing any conflict between long-term planning and operational flexibility.



The Roadblocks: Why Many Institutions Remain Term-by-Term

The honest answers about what's stopping institutions from adopting annual scheduling reveal barriers are less about logistics and more about organizational culture, resource constraints and fear of increased complexity.

FACULTY RESISTANCE AND PLANNING LIMITATIONS

The most commonly cited barrier involves faculty unwillingness or inability to commit to long-term planning.

"We have academic departments that can't schedule for the current term; I would hate to see them trying to plan much further in advance."

"Faculty chairs do not want to commit to more than one term for professor assignments, particularly adjuncts. They worry that a class will be on the schedule and planned for, and they won't be able to find someone to teach it."

"Getting faculty to buy into it and spend the time to plan in advance."

THE SCHEDULES CHANGES CHALLENGE

Institutions struggle with excessive modifications that would undermine annual scheduling benefits.

"We make too many changes too quickly to have an annual schedule work."

"Even doing only one term at a time, we still have a large number of changes."

"Too many scheduling changes; programs not submitting accurate information; faculty turnover. We used to develop an annual schedule, but it was useless because most programs changed 75% or more of what they were offering."

RESOURCE AND CAPACITY CONSTRAINTS

Many institutions feel they lack the infrastructure to support annual scheduling.

"With our current resources, we do not have the capacity to build an annual schedule successfully. This would require a transformation of business processes across the institution, not just in academics."

"It's hard enough to get accurate sections built for the upcoming semester. It seems foolhardy to try building a term beyond that."

"We don't have the administrative buy-in to require departments to plan ahead. We allow entirely reactive changes to meet needs that could have been anticipated."



DATA AND FORECASTING LIMITATIONS

Institutions recognize they lack the analytical tools needed for effective long-term planning.

"We don't do the proper data analysis to do forecasting for needed classes. The data exists, but we don't dedicate resources to analyzing it."

"We need better data about academic progression and course-demand analytics."

"Determining course demand based on our attrition rate and applicant yield."

CULTURAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL INERTIA

Many institutions acknowledge resistance to change itself.

"The biggest roadblock is change management and just convincing the executive team to move forward with annual-schedule creation. They are stuck in their ways of 'this is how it has always been done.'"

"We tend to fall into the 'we have always done it this way, don't fix it unless faculty think it is broken' mindset."

"Mostly 'because we've always done it this way.'"



What this tells us: Barriers to annual scheduling are organizational and cultural. Institutions that successfully implement annual scheduling must first address deeper issues around planning culture, data use and willingness to prioritize learner needs over administrative convenience.



The One Thing They'd Change

When asked what single improvement would make the biggest difference in their scheduling process, responses revealed five clear priorities that transcend institutional size and type.

TECHNOLOGY AND AUTOMATION

The overwhelming desire is to move beyond manual, spreadsheet-based processes.

"I would love to have an affordable software product that allows departments to request days/times and rooms but cannot book them independently."

"Software for class scheduling so it is not such a manual lift on my department."

"We need a tool that accurately forecasts course needs. Right now, it's a bit of an educated-guess approach. Data-driven schedule creation would be much more efficient and accurate."

LEARNER-CENTRIC FOCUS

Many institutions recognize that their scheduling prioritizes faculty convenience over learner success.

"More learner centric. Departments schedule their classes around what the faculty want, not what the learners need."

"Change from being faculty-centric to being learner-centric. Schedule based on what learners need and when they need it to graduate."

"The schedule should be based on demand and need, using enrollment data. Currently it is based on what and when the faculty want to teach."

PROCESS AND COORDINATION IMPROVEMENTS

Institutions want better workflows and communication.

"I would like stricter deadlines for changes. Often we are making schedule changes right until the semester begins and through the first 2 weeks of classes."

"Create and enforce an institution-wide strategy that includes input from all stakeholders."

"I would prefer to have the entire scheduling process centralized in the Registrar's Office."

EXTENDED PLANNING HORIZONS

Many institutions aspire to longer-term scheduling.

"To have the schedule done for the full year."

"I would like to see our university produce a schedule of courses at least 2 years out so learners can plan their course of study."

"Planning a year in advance with a learner ability to view courses and have a plan ready for enrollment once enrollment opens."

DATA AND ANALYTICS FOR DECISION MAKING

Institutions want to replace guesswork with evidence-based planning.

"Use an analytical tool to predict course needs based on learner majors and degree requirements."

"Applying more data to the decisions on what to offer, specifically information about what courses are needed and how many learners need which courses."

"I would love to implement a survey for our learners that allows them to give us course intent for the next two or more terms."



What this tells us: The most frequently mentioned improvements are operational efficiency and learner service. Institutions recognize that better technology, clearer processes and data-driven decisions would fundamentally improve the learner experience and institutional effectiveness.



AACRAO Resources

Need practical guidance for better scheduling? AACRAO's publication *Academic Operations: The Role of the Registrar* includes comprehensive guidance on strategic scheduling practices. Explore this and other resources in the AACRAO Online Bookstore.

Struggling with faculty buy-in? AACRAO Consulting specializes in change management. Contact AACRAO Consulting at consulting@aacrao.org.

Want to chat with other scheduling professionals? AACRAO's Exchange Community is a great way to connect with others doing this work.

Need to see how other institutions handle scheduling policies? AACRAO's Higher Ed Policy Database lets you compare scheduling approaches across nearly 1,000 institutions. Search by keywords, such as "annual scheduling," "registration timeline" or "course planning," to see real policy language from peer institutions. This exclusive benefit for AACRAO institutional members can help you benchmark current practices or draft new policies.

Want to shape future research?

Contact Wendy Kilgore at wendyk@aacrao.org with your scheduling challenges and success stories.

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Kilgore, W. (2025). Beyond Next Semester: The Advantages of Annual Scheduling. American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, Washington, D.C.

American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers

1108 16th St. NW, Suite 400 | Washington, D.C. 20036



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